

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SOVIET INTERNAL AND FOREIGN IMPERATIVES IN MIDDLE
EAST CRISIS

1. SUMMARY: THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP IS CLEARLY TAKING ACCOUNT OF ITS RELATIONS WITH THE US AS IT DEALS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS. BUT THERE ARE CONFLICTING INTERNAL CURRENTS HERE. THEREFORE, WHILE DETENTE HAS OVERALL PRIORITY IN MOSCOW, THERE ARE CONTINGENCIES WHICH COULD OVERRIDE THAT PRIORITY. MASSIVE AIR ATTACKS ON ARAB CAPITALS MAY BE ONE SUCH CONTINGENCY; OCCUPATION OF SYRIA BY ISRAEL MIGHT BE ANOTHER. THERE MAY ALSO BE LESS EXTREME AND MORE LIKELY CONTINGENCIES--SUCH AS FURTHER LOSS OF SOVIET LIFE IN ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS--WHICH WOULD EVOKE SOVIET STEPS WHICH, EVEN THOUGH RELATIVELY RESTRAINED, COULD CREATE A DANGEROUS CYCLE OF ACTIONS-REACTIONS. AND EVEN WITH TOTAL AVOIDANCE OF A SOVIET-US CONFRONTATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE FALL OUT-EFFECT OF THE CRISIS ON CONGRESSIONAL HANDLING OF TRADE MATTERS COULD SIGNIFICANTLY HARM THE SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET AMERICAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY

2. MOSCOW'S IMPERATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST ARE, AS REFLECTED IN THE SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS, COMPLEX AND
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FROM THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT SIGNIFICANT; US ASSESSMENTS OF SOVIET

BEHAVIOR OBVIOUSLY MUST TAKE THEM INTO ACCOUNT. VARIOUS CURRENTS OF ELITE OPINION ARE INVOLVED. ON ONE HAND IS THE LEADERSHIP'S COMMITMENT TO, AND HEAVY INVESTMENT IN, DETENTE WITH THE US, WHICH HAS SUPPORT OF MANY VESTED INTERESTS PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD. ON OTHER HAND ARE THOSE CIRCLES WHICH ARE LESS ENCHANTED WITH DETENTE, AUGMENTED IN THIS INSTANCE BY ELEMENTS WITH A PARTICULAR AX TO GRIND AS REGARDS THE MIDDLE EAST OR THE MILITARY PERFORMANCE OF SOVIET-SUPPORTED ARMED FORCES. AND AND THE LEADERSHIP IS CERTAINLY INFLUENCED HEAVILY BY A GENERAL CONSENSUS ABOUT THE PRESTIGE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SOVIET UNION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN THE WORLD AND DIRECT SOVIET INTERESTS IN THIS REGION WHICH IS, AS BREZHNEV COMMENTED, "SO CLOSE TO OUR BORDERS".

3. DURING CURRENT HOSTILITIES IN ME, SOVIETS WILL HOPE TO AVOID BEING FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEIR SUPPORT FOR ARABS AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH US. BY THEIR OWN LIGHTS, AT LEAST, THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO KEEP BOTH THESE OBJECTIVES IN BALANCE AND TO JUSTIFY THEIR CONTENTION THAT USSR-US DETENTE IS COMPATIBLE WITH ARAB CAUSE. ON THE ONE HAND THEY HAVE GIVEN EGYPT AND SYRIA VERBAL SUPPORT IN LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS, IN PRESS, AND IN US; THEY ARE CONTINUING MILITARY SUPPLIES TO ARAB COMBATANTS; AND THEY HAVE LAUNCHED MISSIONARY EFFORTS TO GET OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES ENGAGED. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY HAVE APPEARED ANXIOUS TO AVOID ACTIONS WHICH WOULD PROVOKE STRONG US NEGATIVE REACTION. THEY HAVE POINTEDLY REFRAINED FROM ANY HINT OF DIRECT SOVIET INVOLVEMENT; THEY HAVE INDICATED (IN APPROACHES TO NON-COMBATANT ARAB GOVERNMENTS) THAT THE FIGHTING IS UP TO THE ARABS; AND THEY HAVE NOT YET STEMMED FLOW OF JEWISH EMIGRATION FROM SOVIT UNION (ALTHOUGH THIS MAY SOON CHANGE).

4. FUTURE COURSE OF WAR WILL DETERMINE WHETHER SOVIETS CAN KEEP TO THIS PATH. A CESSATON OF HOSTILITIES WHICH IS REASONABLY INDECISIVE WOULD MAKE IT EASIEST FOR THEM TO DO SO. FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW, PROBABLY THE BEST OUTCOME (AMONG WHAT APPEAR TO BE CURRENT POSSIBILITIES) WOULD BE AN EARLY CEASEFIRE THAT LEFT EGYPTIAN TROOPS ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE CANAL AND PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIPLOMATIC BARGAINING. SUCH A RESULT WOULD VINDICATE THE SOVIET POLICY OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE ARABS, BUT WOULD ENGAGE THE USSR AND THE US IN JOINT EFFORTS

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(IF VARIOUSLY MOTIVATED) FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION. IT WOULD THUS INVOLVE FEW RISKS FOR SOVIET RELATIONS WITH THE US AND WOULD ALLOW SOVIETS TO ARGUE THAT ARAB PROGRESS OCCURRED UNDER DETENTE UMBRELLA. (OF COURSE WE WOULD NOT EXPECT SOVIETS TO ADVOCATE SUCH AN OUTCOME PUBLICLY WITHOUT EGYPTIAN BLESSING.)

5. THE WORST CONTINGENCY, FROM THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT, WOULD PROBABLY BE ONE IN WHICH THE WAR ESCALATED--FOR EXAMPLE, VIA MASSIVE

ISRAELI AIR RETALIATION ON POPULATION CENTERS OR ON THE ASWAN DAM, OR AN ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF SYRIA. SUCH EXTREME EVENTUALITIES WOULD CERTAINLY PUT HEAVY PRESSURE ON THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO REACT DEMONSTRATIVELY.

6. SHORT OF SUCH A SHARP AND DANGEROUS TURN OF EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THERE MAY BE OTHER POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS--FOR EXAMPLE, FURTHER DAMAGE TO SOVIET INSTALLATIONS AND LOSS OF SOVIET LIFE IN ISRAELI AIR RAIDS, OR STARTLING ISRAELI SUCCESSES IN SYRIA EVEN IF NOT CULMINATING IN TOTAL VANQUISHMENT--TO WHICH MOSCOW WOULD FEEL CONSTRAINED TO REACT.

7. ISSUE OF JEWISH EMIGRATION CUTS DIRECTLY ACROSS CURRENT SOVIET EFFORT TO MAINTAIN BALANCE BETWEEN POLICY TOWARD ARABS AND POLICY TOWARD US. EVEN NOW THE PROBLEM IS AN ACUTE ONE; CONTINUED EMIGRATION OF SOVIET JEWS MUST APPEAR TO ARABS (AND, NO DOUBT, TO SOME IN SOVIET UNION) AS SHARPLY AT ODDS WITH PROFESSED SOVIET POLICIES IN ME. IF HOSTILITIES CONTINUE FOR EVEN A FEW DAYS LONGER OR IF ISRAELIS SCORE MAJOR VICTORY, SOVIETS WOULD PROBABLY FEEL OBLIGED EITHER TO SUSPEND OR TO REDUCE EMIGRATION TO ISRAEL.

8. THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBLE INTERNAL RAMIFICATIONS. AS IN 1967, THE FIGHTING MAY FAN JEWISH NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE USSR AND INCREASE THE PRESSURE FOR EMIGRATION. STEPPED-UP ANTI-ISRAELI ANTI-ZIONIST PROGAGANDA MAY FEED ANTI-SEMITISM AND MAKE THE POSITION OF THE SOVIET JEWISH COMMUNITY MORE DIFFICULT.

9. ALL OF THIS WILL HAVE AN IMPACT ON US PUBLIC OPINION AND CONGRESS, RENDERING EVEN MORE PROBLEMATIC THE PROSPECTS FOR FAVORABLE ACTION ON US-SOVIET TRADE MATTERS. BREZHNEV IS UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS TO DETENTE AND WILL BE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE. FROM THE US SIDE IT IS ALSO

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APPROPRIATE TO CONTINUE, IN OUR OWN REACTIONS, TO RECOGNIZE SOVIET IMPERATIVES AND THUS TO TRY TO MODERATE AND LIMIT SOVIET ACTIONS BOTH INTERNALLY AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST WHICH CAN HAVE THE EFFECT OF PUTTING SOVIET-AMERICAN DETENTE AT RISK.

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